21st Century Teaching and Learning
Learning Stories to Build Transparency and Enhance Professional Learning
Simcoe County DSB

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AMY SZERMINSKA: So I just want to let you know sort of what our day is gonna look like today.

NARRATOR: Amy Szerminska is a program resource teacher for STEAM. She's leading a professional learning session with educators from across Simcoe County District Schoolboard. They're here to learn from one another and share their lesson ideas.

AMY SZERMINSKA: It gives teachers an opportunity to form a real, face to face learning network. Our board covers a pretty wide area and so on days like today we can bring teachers together who maybe didn't have a chance to meet one another before.

NARRATOR: Meeting face to face is a precious opportunity because most of the time they learn from one another virtually through learning stories.

PAT MILLER: So what it's done, it's breaking down borders. We're kind of widespread geographically and so you've got teachers on one part of the county learning from teachers that may be a two hour drive away from them, but they can learn together because they don't actually have to go there. They can look in the learning story.

TEXT ON SCREEN: LEARNING STORIES

NARRATOR: Learning stories is an online platform. Educators share the way they use their funding when integrating Steam in their classrooms. They also discuss how they use these technological tools to develop their students' capacities for real world learning.

ANITA SIMPSON: We wanted to be accountable. How do we know all of these release dollars are actually translating into improved learning, and teaching for children? So the learning story grew off almost like a tentacle off that main route. It wasn't a tangible plan. It was something that someone was inspired about and so we tried that out.

JODIE MALTBY: So using the learning stories were good because it made us focus. It gave us a spot to document our learning, document our steps, how we were going to implement the process. There's a place for people to comment and give us feedback in there. It's great because we're able to see other people's learning stories and what they're doing, maybe get ideas and inspiration from their learning stories for our own. It's in a space where we can refer back to it and we can remember what we want to do and what our focus is and it just allows us to maintain a focus.

SALLY TELFORD: Gives you a space to reflect on what's working and what's not and to keep track of what your goals were. But for the collaborative part especially when we've been giving funding to spend then I can go into all the other schools and see what they're buying and say oh, Erin's getting all these Lego Mr. Learning kits. I didn't even know about that. And then I can go into her learning story, learn a little bit about them, or email with Erin and see how she's using them in her classroom and decide whether that's where we want to spend our money.

TERYR JAY: We collaborate through shared documents through Google Drive. We're sharing pictures of what's going on in the classroom and we're talking about each day how to improve and what we need to bring in for the next period.

MARCI DUNCAN: In every inquiry the teachers that are involved have a learning story and that has been extremely helpful because one, it allows us to support them in ways that we couldn't before, we can share our resource with them and that can be something that's linked on the learning plan or it can be a suggestion of a person that they can connect with because we've read it somewhere else that somebody else is working on something similar. Another really great part about the learning stories is that it provides a context for their learning when we're having conversations with them but it also is a way for the principals to be present in the learning as well or anybody across Simcoe County so that we can all work together.

TEXT ON SCREEN: CHANGING ROLES

NARRATOR: Leadership roles change within the learning stories. Members from all levels of the board can comment and see what others are doing.

PAT MILLER: The learning stories have transformed the superintendent relationships with teachers because now they have a real example to talk to that teacher about. So they've been into the learning stories and the learning plan and when they come to the

school and visit with the teachers they can have a conversation about that new learning that, that teacher's doing right then and there.

ANITA SIMPSON: Having superintendents go into school learning plans and teacher's learning stories, and then seeing them at conferences, and seeing teachers on school visit they notice that a principal from another school might have seen what they've documented. When someone notices you and someone sees you, and hears you, you feel like you matter. You feel like what you're doing is making a difference and I think that has allowed us to acknowledge the amazing things what teachers are doing that never, ever have known without this digital exchange that we've created.

AMY SZERMINSKA: Make sure you include whatever thinking you think will help someone use the resource.

TEXT ON SCREEN: COLLABORATION AND COMMUNICATION

NARRATOR: The learning stories create a sense of open collaboration and communication among educators across the board.

PAT MILLER: Transparency is probably the key one in terms of everyone being able to see what everyone else is up to. When schools are looking for ideas on where to move forward they will often find schools that they have contacts at or where they've worked before and they'll go into their learning story or their learning plan and have a look at what that school's up to, and then they'll offer them some kind of supportive comment and then they'll take that learning back to their own plan.

JODIE MALTBY: We're all accountable for our learning, just like the students are accountable, teachers are accountable, principals are accountable to making what we're doing purposeful and seeing the impact of that. So making it transparent has allowed that to happen and I also find that it's garnered ideas. It's helping with inspiration and seeing what other people are doing. It sparks interest but also validates what you're doing yourself.

ANITA SIMPSON: The deeper we go with that transparency the more sharing happens between school leaders, between teachers, between system folks and I think that is lifting people into a place of excitement, and curiosity, and empowerment.

MARCI DUNCAN: We're able to better collaborate with each other. When we have an idea, and when we have multiple ideas and we put them together we're able to grow, we're able to go deeper in that thinking. We're able to challenge each other’s thinking in a way that pushes us further. That's been really impactful for our students.

NARRATOR: And the impact on the students shows. They’ve now become independent learners.

SALLY TELFORD: Now they'll come in and by like oh, Ms. Telford, what's this? And there's a box with a big ramp in it, and balls, and props and they know that their job is to go, take it to a space and just play with it and learn what they can and share it with their friends. And they're not asking me for structure anymore. They've taken a lot of ownership of the space and of their learning.

NARRATOR: And in a collaborative and transparent space educators can deepen and transform their own learning.

TEXT ON SCREEN: “The deeper we go with transparency the more sharing happens between schools leaders, between teachers, between system folks, and I think that is lifting people into a place of excitement, curiosity and empowerment.” – Anita Simpson, Superintendent